

Governor Pat Quinn's State of the State Address

Wednesday, January 13, 2010

Well thank you very much. Before I begin, I think it's important for all of us in the Land of Lincoln. Our state, almost 13 million people live here and some of whom are Haitian Americans and we know today a very devastating natural disaster has hit the country of Haiti, the people of Haiti, and I think the people of Illinois have generous hearts and we say prayers for those victims of the natural disaster and ask God to help them to recover as quickly as possible. And I know the people of Illinois are good and true, and whatever we can do to help the people of Haiti, we will do and I really want to thank everyone here for the warm welcome.

I appreciate the opportunity to be the Governor of the State of Illinois, the Land of Lincoln; it's a great honor. I know it's a trust. I believe the Office of Governor is one that belongs to the people. And serving in this office for nearly a year, it has been a great honor and privilege, an opportunity to visit people to visit people all across our State of Illinois. It's a great state, a diverse state. And I believe everybody's in and nobody's left out.

We all know that I assume this office under the most difficult of circumstances. The constitution of our State was followed by our legislature, by you the elected representatives of the people. And on the 29th of January last year, I took the Oath of Office. In taking that Oath of Office, I knew that we had a State in crisis, a State that needed stabilization, that needed an honest governor and an honest government. And I think in the past year, we've worked together - night and day in some cases, to win the trust of the people. We have to build the trust of the people. Obviously, the events that preceded my Oath of Office shook the confidence of the people of Illinois. And their hearts were hurting. It was our duty as men and women of a democracy, the greatest democracy on planet Earth, to come together in good faith and reform our government. And I said at the beginning of my time as Governor: This has to be a year of reform. And I think in the course of carrying out our duties in the past year, we've done very well with respect to restoring ethics and integrity to our government. We understood there was a need to pass strong, tough laws to deal with honesty and integrity. The integrity of our government must always match the honesty of our people.

So we went about the task: we reformed the public pensions; we dealt with boards and commissions; we enacted strong standards with respect to procurement and contracts. We reformed the behavior; we enacted strong ethic standards for lobbyists as well as state employees. All of those were very important reforms and needed reforms. In addition we took on the very difficult task of looking how campaigns are conducted and how they're financed - never an easy subject in any place in this country or at the federal level. We came together in good faith; we worked together; we passed one law that was found wanting, so I didn't sign that law.

We came together again, working together in a democracy and enacted a campaign finance reform law that I did sign, that is for the first time a chance to have limits on campaign contributions in the State of

Illinois and much more disclosure and openness with respect to money and politics. I think that's a great achievement. I think when time is written, and history is written, people will look back and say the members of the general assembly together with the Governor in 2009, heard the people and enacted fundamental and ethical reforms.

I spoke on the day the campaign finance reform bill passed the House and Senate with Sheila Simon, who's a good friend, who's the daughter of Paul Simon, who endorsed me for Lieutenant Governor. And I told Sheila that we didn't get the whole loaf on the campaign finance reform bill but she immediately said, "We got many slices." And I think that's really how her father would look at it, and I think how democracy works. There may be more to do; I think there is. I think we do need in Illinois, what I would call, an ethics initiative that we would put into our constitution that would give voters at every level of government - whether it be the local level, or county level, or the state level - the power to petition and binding referendum to enact binding ethical standards and campaign finance rules that the people feel are appropriate for all of us who are elected representatives.

I'd like to see that on the ballot in 2010, on November 2, when those of us who are running for statewide office go before the people. I think that it's important to give the people of Illinois the tools that they need to strengthen our democracy. We have to strengthen the voters; they're the ones who count. They're the ones who pay our salaries. They're the ones who pay the taxes. And I think having an ethics initiative: an initiative solely devoted to ethics in government and campaign finance reform. That is a very important need in our State of Illinois, because democracy is a process that goes on year after year. And it's very important that we bring the people into our democracy and let them set the rules for our conduct and our behavior.

I am very pleased, and I want to commend all those in this legislature that did enact a constitutional amendment resolution that will be on the ballot this fall establishing recall process in our State. This is the first time in the history of Illinois such a constitutional amendment has been presented to the people. It took three-fifths vote of each house of the general assembly: both the House and Senate. And people must enact the recall amendment by three-fifths vote. And I think they will. I think the people of Illinois know that before I became Governor, we had great difficulties with two governors: one who's in jail, and the other who is indicted and awaiting trial. And I think it's important always to give the people of Illinois the opportunity to cast their vote for confidence - or no confidence - in a governor who may be betraying the public trust. So I think enacting a recall amendment and an ethic initiative into our constitution this year will complete the job that the people of Illinois sent us to do. When things go wrong in a democracy, what you have to use is the tools of democracy to correct those mistakes.

Now I think in the course of working together this year, we have shown that when people work together we can accomplish great things. We can accomplish amazing things. I think one of the things that was bad in our state before my arrival was there was much dissension, discord, disharmony, friction, name-calling. It doesn't work in life; it doesn't work in a democracy. It's very important that we always have an attitude of civility in the course of our work, that we respect all of those who are elected by the people and that we try our very best to work together to accomplish great things. I think it's important to go over a few of the things that we've done this year, that we have accomplished. And I think it's

something that's important for the people to know that their representatives worked together on issues of very high importance to the public.

And one of those issues that occurred this year was the fact that when I became Governor, we didn't have all of our State parks open - or our historic sites, and that the Governor's Mansion was rarely used. I think it was important for the people of Illinois to see the people's house - the Governor's Mansion - was open to the people. And on Abraham Lincoln's birthday, his bicentennial, we had an open house at the Governor's Mansion. We've had many, many events; we've invited legislators as well as ordinary, everyday people in Illinois - the heart and soul of our State - to come to the Governor's Mansion and to come to our State parks. I think it's very, very important that in this time of economic recession, we have parks available for the people. And I made sure that that happened when I became Governor.

We want to leave no child inside in Illinois. I believe that it's important for kids to get outside in nature with their moms and dads, and with others, their friends, to see the wonders of nature. Long ago, a hundred years ago, when Teddy Roosevelt was president of our country, he said conservation is the patriotic thing to do. And it's important that we understand the spiritual value of being in nature, and so our State parks are quite important to us. And I was distressed that my predecessor padlocked some of the State parks. And very early in my term as Governor I ordered that the parks be opened, and they are. And I'm glad to see that.

That's just the beginning of openness in our government. We had to work together on all kinds of important tasks. One of which, a very important one that's important for our economy, is that we had to get three-fifths vote of the general assembly in the House and in the Senate, 60 percent of each house, to vote for what is called a capital bill or a job recovery bill, whatever you want to call it. For ten years in Illinois - for ten years, we did not have legislation passed that invested in the fundamental things in our economy. Like safe roads and safe bridges. Like improving our water systems. Like making sure we have good rail systems to get goods to market. To build our schools and rebuild our schools. There was a lot of friction; we all know it. But finally this past year, we came together, worked together, and enacted a landmark law that will really help our State today and tomorrow with respect to its economy and jobs. We invested together and worked together on that.

You know I want to commend all of those who worked on that: the leadership of the Republican Party, the Democratic Party, and the membership of both parties. We understood that the folks back home, the folks who elected us, they needed us to get this job done, and we worked together to get it done. It wasn't easy; it took a lot of hard work, but that's what democracy is all about: banding together and working together. The same way when something goes wrong in our democracy, we don't overlook it.

What happened at our University of Illinois, our great State university that we're all so proud of, they had an admissions review scandal, and admissions scandal, that came up in the course of the year. I appointed an admissions review commission to look into it, to find out the facts. They found the facts; I had to replace seven trustees on the University of Illinois Board of Trustees. They elected a new board chairman, Christopher Kennedy. A new president has taken office, Stan Ikenberry who's doing an excellent job. And that's how you deal with things in a democracy: When something doesn't going go

according to what you want it to do, it isn't supposed to go that way, then you correct the mistake. President Ikenberry told me not long ago that the board at the University of Illinois today is the best one he's ever seen. And it's so important that we have good leadership at all of our educational institutions. So that's what democracy is, people coming together, when a problem arises, working together to solve it.

Another one that we've worked on in the past year that I think should get some attention is the whole issue of foreclosure. Many of our neighbors, good people, through no fault of their own have lost their job, and they're danger of losing their homes. We enacted a good bill that gives more time for people to get their finances together to ward off foreclosure. Another landmark bill that we passed was to help utility consumers, people who are struggling in a tough recession, paying their utility bills. We have a law now in place now that I signed that helps people of very poor or modest income afford their utilities in cold winter, as well as making sure that all of us have an opportunity to use our utility bill to help finance energy efficient improvements in our homes.

Yet another consumer bill, a very important one that we enacted, was to deal with the issue of denial of care by insurance companies. Many health insurance consumers have found that when they need help the most the insurance company denies care. We should have a process where there's an independent review of that and we were able to pass that law; it's a very important law. We've worked together on that. And it will make sure that we have good health in our society.

And I think health is important. I think every life is important. There's a passage in Scripture that says, if you save one life, you save the whole world. And this year in Illinois, a historic year - 2009, for the first time since 1921 we had less than 1,000 deaths on the highways of Illinois. The lowest number since 1921.

Now that took a lot of work. Members of the general assembly passed legislation that was signed into law. It took State policemen on the highways, the men and women who work on our Department of Transportation - oftentimes in very difficult weather - to clear the roads and make them safe. It took law enforcement at every level. It took a lot hard work. But there was one person in particular in my opinion who's led the way for our great record at reducing fatalities, saving lives on our highways. He's a man, a modest man, who has always stood for public safety. He's my friend. The day I got sworn in, he called me up and said, whatever it takes to get our State back on track, he was willing to help and serve. We passed a law this year, a very important law that will ban texting while driving. He was the leader of that, working with Representative John D'Amico. And I want to publicly thank our Secretary of State Jesse White. Please stand up, Jesse.

I said Jesse White's a modest man. We're on the eve of Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday. He would 81 this coming year. And Dr. King as you may know, his first pastorate was in Montgomery, Alabama, the home of Alabama State; that's where Jesse White was going to school the very time Dr. King arrived in Montgomery. And Jesse White as a college student joined with his friends and helped support Dr. King. They were there when Rosa Parks said she wasn't going to move to the back of the bus. Jesse White has had a life of service. This year is the 50th anniversary of the Jesse White Tumblers, half a century of

helping mentor young people and making sure they go the right way in life. So I'm publicly very grateful to you, Jesse. You've been a great friend, a great advisor; I really appreciate your help in these troubled times and helping me as Governor of Illinois. And you're a great man. Thank you very much.

As I mentioned, any time we can save a life, it's a very important thing. And I think one of my very first bills that I signed this year had to do with mammograms and breast cancer screening. We don't want anyone to be denied health measures that they need in order to save their life or make their life better. And it takes sometimes in a democracy the efforts of lots of citizens at the grassroots level to bring to our attention the need for important reforms. And that happened, and one of the first bills I did sign was a bill that allows women of color, women of low income access to mammograms and breast cancer screening.

And that effort was due to the tireless efforts of two women who are with us today, and I think it's important to recognize their efforts. Dr. Janice Phillips is a doctor, a leader in the area of minority health and healthcare disparities. She's on the board of the Susan G. Komen Cure for Cancer and the Metropolitan Breast Cancer Task Force. Together with Angela Walker, who I had dinner with last night at the Governor's Mansion. Angela is a breast cancer survivor. She works for the American Cancer Society. She's focused on educating the public on the importance of mammograms and early detection. I'd like both Dr. Phillips and Angela to stand up and be recognized for their great effort.

I think it's important to recognize citizens when they take their time, their effort, their ability to organize and bring together a whole community of people to get a law passed. Just imagine that. Some group of people, through their hard work, have passed a law in our State, the Land of Lincoln. I think it's very important to recognize that kind of effort in a democracy. Everybody in a democracy is important. It's not a spectator sport. It's something where all of us have a duty as citizens to participate. And related to that, there's another issue I was very impressed with in the past year.

We had a horrific scandal at a cemetery in our state, Burr Oak Cemetery. It was on the national and international news. It was a very, very horrific scandal, and it's incumbent upon all us here in Springfield in our State capitol to address what went wrong there at Burr Oak and may go wrong at other cemeteries in our state, and I want to commend the general assembly for taking this issue and squarely addressing it. It's very, very important we pass reform legislation there; that's part of working together. I think that's the key for our State's success at all times: all of us working together for important causes.

And also another issue that came up that was a very difficult one in the past year that I think really needs attention, because it's something we did for our country. There is a passage in the third verse of "American the Beautiful" that talks about what we have to do for our country. And it says, "O beautiful for heroes proved in liberating strife. Who more than self their country loved and mercy more than life!" And I think it's important that all of us put our country above ourselves from time to time; it's very important that we answer the call to duty.

I was contacted by our President, Barack Obama and his administration about the need to come to Illinois, to our state, home state to inspect a prison, a nearly vacant prison that we haven't been able to afford to open. Thomson prison, far away from here, probably 150 miles, right on the border of Iowa. It

wasn't easy. There were then some that when we even opened the door for inspection, criticized that decision. But as Governor you have to make decisions; you have to have fortitude; you have to do what you think is right, and what I tried to do when the president called, and his administration, is allow those federal prison officials to come to Illinois to inspect the prison. When they came through here they found that it was an ideal prison for a federal prison that they were anxious to buy.

But in order to really make this go forward in our state, I agreed that I would sell the prison to the federal government for a fair market value, but we have a process, a good process Illinois: where legislators come together, of both parties, to analyze a particular matter, and last week that analysis was complete. I do want to thank the members of that committee who looked at that issue. In particular, I want to salute Rep. Jim Sacia, who was not a member of the committee, but when he heard about the opportunity to create jobs in western Illinois, stood forward and said that this was, upon his analysis, a good transaction for the people.

I also want to salute members of the other party that I'm not a member of, but who voted in favor of the transaction, Sen. Dave Syverson, as well as Rep. Rich Myers and all the members who voted for that transaction. I think it will be one that will help our state in the sense that we will have more jobs, and a federal prison. There may be more than 3,000 new jobs, new income to a part of our state. I think it's important to remember that Illinoisans, the people of our state – we are never, ever afraid of anything. We can handle any task. The decision of the committee last week to have the transaction go forward, I think is a good decision; it will help our country. As General David Patraeus has told the president that the closing of Guantanamo Bay Prison in Cuba and moving those detainees elsewhere, incarcerating them elsewhere is imperative for our national security. So when the president of the United States and his military advisors call this Governor, he's there to listen and to help in any way he can. And I think the people of Illinois appreciate that kind of work.

And on the matter of jobs, I think that is the matter before us all. Last year, a year of reform, a year of stabilization, I think we were enabled to enact a far-reaching law that will help us get jobs back on track in Illinois. But I want to be a governor who understands the economic needs of everyday people in our state. I have always done that as State Treasurer, as Lieutenant Governor, and now I'm the Governor and I think the number one issue in Illinois today is getting our economy back on track. And I think that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt said a long time ago, during the Great Depression, when my mother and father were young that the best social policy ever devised, the best government program ever devised is a good job. And that's what we have to understand: that our mission this year is to revive our economy and put people back to work. We can do it in the State of Illinois.

I want to be the "Building Governor." I want to build more things, more good things, across our state than any other governor in state history. We have the wherewithal to do it. We have the will to do it. We have the people to do it. We have the work ethic to do it. It's very important in Illinois that we have work.

We have to replace, in some our neighborhoods in Illinois, a culture of violence with a culture of work, and we must have work available to those who are ready and willing to do the job.

I've laid out a jobs and economic growth plan for our state. I want to go over a little bit of what we're going to be doing this year. We have more construction planned for Illinois: road construction, bridge repair, water investment, rail construction. Helping build new schools and repair old schools

This is what we have to do. We have to prime the pump and get our economy back on track, and we can do that through public works that put our people to work. I think it's very important to understand that we have an opportunity in Illinois to make investments that will not only help create jobs today but will set the foundation for economic growth for our state for many years to come. I want to go over today a few of the ways we're going to do that.

We want to be, Illinois, an inland port for the whole nation. We're right in the middle of the country. Every railroad in the nation crisscrosses our state. We have great transportation; we want to make it better. We want to improve our roads and bridges. This past year we were able to pave and repair two thousand miles of roads. That's enough roads to go from Springfield to the Pacific Ocean, and you ain't seen nothin' yet! In the coming year, we're going to do even more. We repaired 93 bridges this past year; we want to do more in the coming year.

It's very important to understand that we can be an inland port for the whole central part of our country, the heart of our nation. But we have to make sure we have good transportation. We have to unsnarl some of the freight bottlenecks in our rail. We have to have good passenger rail. It's been growing by leaps and bounds; we want to keep it going. We want to have a passenger train that goes from Chicago to Rockford and beyond. We want to have a passenger train that goes from Chicago to the Quad Cities and beyond. And we also want to have high-speed rail that connects Chicago to St. Louis.

You know, fast trains are the wave of the future. Our president is committed to this. Our state has invested \$400 million dollars. We look forward to getting a decision from Washington very soon on a high-speed rail network where our state is the center for the whole network for the Midwest. I've worked with other governors across the Midwest, both democrat and republican. We understand that rail can create a lot of new jobs for our state, and we're very committed to that.

We're also committed to air transportation. We have to understand that there's an opportunity in Peotone to build a new airport that will serve passengers and freight, and create new economic growth and jobs. I want to accelerate our investment in the third airport this year.

When we talk about fast trains, I'd like to see a fast train that goes from Chicago through the South Suburbs past Peotone, through Kankakee, all the way to our great state university in Urbana-Champaign. It's very important that we have super fast rail and even in our capital bill, we have some resources available to begin planning a very fast train that would connect Chicago and Champaign. I think it's important to understand that as our region gets closer and closer together through transportation, we can grow our economies correspondingly across the Midwest but particularly connecting to universities and airports and having the opportunity with rail and highway transportation to be at the center of distribution for the whole middle part of our country.

We want to use an inland port, that whole idea, to create new jobs, high-wage jobs in Illinois. This isn't pie in the sky; we're already doing it and beginning it in Joliet, where we are creating an intermodal that is going to create thousands of jobs for hard-working people.

I also think it's important not to make little plans. We have to have big plans – we have to look forward. We cannot have a governor who just sees a day or two ahead. We've got to have a plan for our economy for the next generation. That's why I'm committed to making sure that we have in our state, the kind of biotechnology in our state that we are capable of. We have great pharmaceutical companies in Illinois. We have great research universities. We have great hospitals. This summer in Chicago will be the International Bio Convention. It's important that we welcome them with open arms because biotechnology in all of its forms is a great way to grow the Illinois economy.

We also understand that FutureGen, a project that is on the drawing board and is close to fruition, located in Matton, Illinois, where we have clean coal, we do it in the right way. This is an opportunity for our State, and I want to personally thank Senator Durbin for his leadership on this issue. Hopefully we can get that investment in downstate Illinois.

I also think another area that we need to improve upon, and I want to commend the legislature for your action yesterday. It's important that we understand that in the middle of the country where people want to come to see the great sights of Illinois, not just in Chicago, but here in Springfield and all over, we want to be a hospitable place. A place for tourism, a place for history-based tourism - to learn about learn about Lincoln, a place for nature-based tourism, to see an eagle fly over the Illinois river, a place to come to a convention in Chicago.

And it's very important to make sure that we make sure that our conventions, our facilities for conventions at McPier, McCormick Place, are done in the right way. We have work to do there – we know that, but we began that work yesterday. I look forward to signing the bill that has passed the general assembly. We want to make sure those 303,000 jobs that we have in conventions and hospitality and tourism in Illinois multiply and grow. We have to understand that that's a good part for our state to grow its economy because of all the opportunities that exist there.

A growing economy and a growing middle class: that's the key to empowerment for the people of Illinois. We have to have a governor who has a plan, who sees the future. And I see a great future in green collar jobs in Illinois.

We have to understand that we have to have a green way of thinking, and a green way of acting. Sustainability is the key to economic empowerment in our country. Those are jobs in energy efficiency, renewable energy, water conservation; they will not go away. By definition, they stay in our own backyard. We have to teach young people who may be in a violent neighborhood not to take up a gun and use it against their fellow human being. Rather, they should take up a caulking gun and learn how to weatherize buildings. That's what we have to do in Illinois.

I want to thank the Black Caucus and all the members of the general assembly who led the way for a weatherization initiative in Illinois. We know we have cold weather, whether it's in January or February,

or other times of the year. We want to make sure that our homes and our businesses and our institutions are weatherized. We can save money for consumers; at the same time we can teach green collar skills to young boys and girls who want a job. They want a chance. They want to be in the middle class. That's what our country is always based on: having people with opportunity to follow their dream and get a skill that can make a difference.

I really feel that the green economy, the opportunity to have energy efficiency in all of its forms across our state is very, very important as we go into this year. And that's why in the bill you enacted and I signed, the capital bill, we have substantial investment in energy efficiency. We don't want to build one building in Illinois: one public building, one school, one university building, one kind of building of any kind without making sure that it's energy efficient, that it's LEED-certified, that it's sustainable, that engages in water conservation. We have the resources thanks to the good work of people here in this assembly working with the Governor. We have the resources to embark on this journey. When we build a new road, we want to lay fiber next to that road so we can have high-speed Internet. Not just in some areas in Illinois, but all across our state where nobody is left out, where we don't have a digital divide.

High-speed Internet, broadband deployment is key for all of us to have better education, better healthcare, better law enforcement, more jobs in the future. And again, our capital bill is investing in broadband deployment.

I want to say a word about our agriculture. In Illinois we have great, great agriculture. I had the honor of working with men and women in agriculture when I was State Treasurer and also when I was Lieutenant Governor. There's only one person in the whole history of Illinois who's been in this Office of Governor who has been voted Mr. Soybean by the Illinois Soybean Association. You're looking at him.

My nickname is Soy Boy! And I understand that our whole green economy depends a lot on our agriculture. Because George Washington Carver, a long time ago when he worked for Henry Ford got plastic out of soybeans. You can get fuel out of them, soy biodiesel; you can eat them. And it's very, very important that we understand that our corn and our soybeans are very key parts of the Illinois economy. 40 percent of our economy comes from agriculture.

We need to honor those who till our land, who plow our fields. They're very special people, they work very hard. They have a tremendous work ethic, and I really honor all of those in Illinois agriculture. We have to work with them to grow our opportunities, to have opportunities to export our products. To take our bio products and convert them into plastics or other goods and services that make a difference around the world.

The Shedd Aquarium is the largest aquarium in the world, most visited aquarium in the world. It's located in our state, in Chicago. They have a soybean roof. They discovered not too long ago that you can take soybeans, convert them to a paint, a white paint, and roll that paint onto an asphalt roof like the Shedd Aquarium - 75-years-old - has, and that white paint reflects the sun off the roof, keeps the fish cooler and the people cooler. And it saves money on air conditioning. And they use less electricity. That's how we can use less electricity. That's how we can use Illinois' 40 acres of soybeans in a creative way with an Illinois business that creates this white paint, soybean paint, that's then put on our

institutions, and saves consumers money and makes us more sustainable. We have to see how these interconnections come together. That's what I believe a Governor does. He looks for ways to put these people together to work together for the common good.

Related to this: the whole area of wind mills and wind turbines. I think this is something that all of us will embrace as we go through this next few years. We've invested money in our capital bill in this. We have investment also in opportunities for credit for those who develop wind power. We make sure they have contracts and so on. But what's important about wind power is it's clean, and it's all from our own backyard and it's all American.

I've been to Iraq; I've been to the combat zone, and I've seen firsthand how heroic our soldiers are. And I think it's our duty back home to try and be as energy independent as we can. We do not want to see our dollars indirectly go into the hands of petro-dictators somewhere around the world who are financing terrorism. One way we can fight back is to have more renewable power in our state. From the wind, from solar, from biomass, we can do this. We have a law that this general assembly passed, a good law that says by 2025, 25 percent of our power, our energy, will come from renewable sources. We can do this; we've got to embark on it right now. We've got to build the wind turbines and do it in a proper way.

One thing about the sustainable economy, or the green economy, or investing in renewable energy, is it brings in jobs that create prosperity. Siemens, which is an internationally-known company, came to Elgin this year. They're building gears for these giant wind turbines, manufacturing it right in our own backyard. So we have to grab this opportunity and develop the green economy for jobs for the people of Illinois.

I think there are many other ways to do this. But I think it is important as we take a look at our economy to understand that jobs follow brainpower. And we can never forget that. That it's very, very important for all of us in Illinois to invest in education, from beginning of life to the end of life.

The Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis did a study not long ago and said the very best investment the government can make is in early childhood education. It pays dividends for generations.

For the first time in our state's history we included early childhood facilities, education facilities, in our capital bill. We're going to help build some of those buildings that those young boys and girls will learn in.

A long time ago, Carl Sandburg, Poet Laureate of Illinois said the birth of a baby is God's opinion that the world should go on, and if God thinks the world should go on with that baby, we better take good care of that baby. That's the way I look at it, and I think it's very important that that learning begins at birth. Birth to age five is a very key time for all children in Illinois. And we have to, as adults and parents, be custodians of the future. When the history of our time is written, they're not going to ask us how big our bank account was, or what kind of house you lived in, or what kind of car you drove, they're going to ask what you did, what we did to help make better the lives of children.

So I think as we go about our work this year, we should have this attitude that we are working for the future. We have to do hard things today in order to make our kids' and their kids' lives better. That's really bringing out the best in Illinois. And that's why I believe so much not only in early childhood education but our elementary and secondary education.

We have to have high standards; we have to invest in education. But we must make sure it's accountable education. I want to thank the general assembly this year for passing a very good bill that took a lot of hard work. I want to commend Sen. Kimberly Lightford in particular for all the work she put in to expand public charter schools in Illinois. We were able to sign that law, and I think it's going to make a difference for children who want that particular education across the state. And just yesterday in the general assembly, in a very quick time, working with a lot of different people, and I want to salute Roger Eddy – Rep. Eddy, Rep. Jerry Mitchell who worked so hard on getting a law passed that can make a difference for years to come, called "Race to the Top," accountable education. We have to comply with a federal deadline of next week to get our application in for up to half a billion dollars in federal money for "Race to the Top," to make sure our education in our state at the elementary and secondary level is second to none.

It's gratifying to see so many school districts, I think it's up to 340 schools districts, have already signed on to participate in this program. We've got to understand that education at all levels is the key to economic empowerment. It's the best way for equal opportunity for the most people in a democracy.

And that's why I believe in community colleges. We have our community colleges in Illinois bursting at the seams. Almost all of them have at least 10 percent enrollment increases, because community colleges are key to having a nimble economy to take advantage of the opportunities that are presented to us across the world. We have to have community colleges that give people the skills they need to compete in a world economy. When something bad happens, when you lose your job, what our citizens in Illinois do is they don't quit; they aren't gloom and doom people. They go back to school - they improve their skills. And I know this firsthand because I used to teach community college at night, and I saw how hard our men and women in Illinois want to improve their lives and continue their skills. It's important we invest in community college. It's very important we invest in our four-year universities.

One of the great things we did this year, working together, was to make sure that the MAP program, the scholarship program, a program that's been around for half a century, that provides scholarships this year for 138,000 students - 56,000 of them go to community colleges, the rest go to public and private four-year universities. That program was in danger; we knew that, but we came together. We didn't throw up our hands; we didn't wring our hands. We said we can get this job done and we passed a law to make sure that the MAP program was protected.

And I was so inspired when I was here that day, I believe in October, when all those students and their parents and their teachers came to our capitol in Springfield. That was the loudest I've ever heard this building resound with the calls of students to make sure that the MAP program was protected. They were well-behaved, but they do believe in the power of democracy and the power of their own voice. And so I want to salute all of those MAP students in Illinois, those scholarship students, many of them

the first in their family who have ever gone to college. We have one of them today. Cary Ashe is with us, he's a student member of the faculty senate over at Champaign at the University there. He helped organize the student movement to help save the MAP program. Why don't you stand up and be recognized Cary?

We want to make sure that we have as many scholarships as possible for our students. I look forward to working with you as we go through this year and having dedicated funding for our scholarship program in Illinois. I don't think it should be ever be put in jeopardy. We need to make sure it has dedicated funding, and that's a job for all of us to work on.

Now I said before that jobs follow brainpower. We have some of the best universities on planet Earth right here in Illinois, and we are very proud of our universities. We, the people of Illinois invest in those universities; our sons and daughters go to those schools, and we want to make sure that those who graduate from our universities hopefully stay in Illinois. And it's important that we understand that we in our educational system are preparing those who are going to create the new businesses of the future, invent the new products, work in very complex jobs that require great skill. So education has to be a part of our economic agenda to protect and grow the middle class in Illinois. We've got to understand that education and jobs go together.

I do want to also recognize today two young men who went to school in Illinois. This general assembly has provided for an Illinois Math and Science Academy that's world-renowned, that students who have graduated from there have certainly made their mark on our economy and on our world. And also, these two young men went to the University of Illinois where we have at the university, being constructed right now, the world's fastest computer, it's called the Blue Waters project. It's a very important project that will help our economy; it's going to help education in Illinois, the fastest computer on planet Earth, the most powerful supercomputer. We are very proud of that.

We have to make sure when we make that investment that we get the fruits of that investment, but these two young men that I want to recognize now, are graduates of our high schools in Illinois as well as our university. One is Mike McCool, graduated in 1991 from the Math & Science Academy. He was on a team at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign that created Mosaic, the Internet browser that was used to start Netscape. His colleague is Ramez Naam who helped develop two of the most widely-used pieces of software in the whole world: the Microsoft Internet Explorer and Microsoft Outlook. And since 2002, he has served as a member of the advisory board of the NanoBusiness Alliance, a member of the World Future Society, and holds a degree in computer science from our University of Illinois. We've got to develop brains like Mike McCool and Ramez Naam, over and over again, in order to have a strong economy in Illinois, and that means investing in our education. I'd like Mike and Ramez to stand up and be recognized for their contribution.

Okay, well we all know that education is important but we have to pay for it, and I think that's the part of the address here today where the governor who comes by constitutional mandate in January of the year to report to the people and to the general assembly. We have to make sure that everyone is listening to the truth, because our state, as you know, has a severe budget deficit. I didn't create it, and

when I assumed office it was \$11.5 billion. We have done everything we can this year to try to manage this financial crisis. It's the worst financial calamity that Illinois has ever had, and we have been a state since 1818. We've done all things imaginable: we've cut costs across the board in Illinois, our expenses; we're going to reduce our budget, the general revenue budget by about \$2 billion. It was the mandate of the people and the General Assembly, and we've listened to that mandate. I've cut my pay; I take furloughs like all my other workers. It's very important that we understand in tough times those in government have to tighten their belt, and we have.

We've also used the resources of the federal government that have been made available to us, through President Obama's leadership. Our state and many other states - every other state - has received help from the federal government during this very difficult recession. We will continue to do that. I want to thank the general assembly yesterday, for understanding that having \$250 million, an opportunity to borrow that money, that we can spend on our healthcare and Medicaid - that we can bring back from the federal government, an enhanced Medicaid match under the federal stimulus. We tried to do this in December; we were blocked, but I am thankful to the general assembly - that you saw the wisdom of doing this and yesterday passed the law that I will sign that will get us more federal money under this enhanced match for healthcare. Because part of managing our budget right now is getting as many federal resources as we can.

I am going to be at the Governors Association meeting next month in Washington where the governors across our country will come together, and work with the president and the federal Congress to help our states navigate through this perilous economic time. My mom and dad, as I said, grew up in the Great Depression. We don't have a Great Depression, but we do have a Great Recession. And it's caused great, great difficulties for the people of Illinois. Our income tax and sales tax revenues have declined precipitously during this recession, and we have to revive them. That's what our economic plan is all about. That's why everyone here worked so hard to get a job recovery plan passed last year that we implemented, began to implement this past year, and this year we are going to really get it going. Get people back to work, hopefully have more confidence, and buy goods and services that they need for their family.

But it is important to know that when we have a situation, where we are getting federal resources, we're cutting costs, we're using strategic borrowing where necessary, this has happened in the past; sometimes it has to happen again, in order to get our state through a tough time.

As you know, there was an effort last summer, by some, to cut human services in Illinois during this Great Recession, cut them in half. Now I didn't think that was right, and I vetoed that budget. And we went back to work, and we passed a different budget, one that does involve some borrowing in order to keep our human services going.

What are these human services? They are things like child care to make sure that working parents have a good place for their children to go to, during the day, and to learn; we have to invest in child care in Illinois. I was not going to cut child care in half. Same way with our community care, which is a great program that provides someone of modest wages - to help our seniors stay in their home, so they don't

have to go to a nursing home. They can be in their own neighborhood, participate in their neighborhood activities, go to their local church. Go to things in their community that they've been used to for years and years. Our program of community care is an outstanding one, and we weren't going to cut that in half.

Same way with our persons with disabilities. They are special people in Illinois, there was an effort to cut programs for them, slash them in half. I would not stand for it. We want to make sure that those who have disabilities have independent living and an opportunity to fulfill their dreams, and so we rejected the, I think, unwise efforts, to cut the budget for those with disabilities. It's very important, I think, in Illinois, even in a tough time, that we always retain our heart, our decency.

We have to have a government that understands that when some people get a bad break in life, lose their job, it isn't their fault, and they don't despair. They don't think about committing suicide, or engage in bad behavior, whether it be alcoholism or violence. We've got to help those people and rescue those people, so that's the part of the governor's mission I think, to make sure we have a fair and decent budget. We had to work on that overtime last year; it didn't end on May 31st as you know. We went through June, and then half of July, and finally we came to a budget that's far from perfect. But it is a budget that we have to work on over the course of this fiscal year and the next fiscal year as we prepare for the future.

Now I do believe we need more revenue. I think after cutting all the costs, after using strategic borrowing, after getting as much money as we can get from the federal government, we are still short. We have to understand that in a democracy, in tough times, it takes fortitude to look at what the facts are, not to kid ourselves. There are some who have budget plans right now, that sound good if you say them fast, but when you take a look at the fine print, they are there cutting human services, cutting education, cutting healthcare for people who have no other healthcare but what we can provide through Medicaid. It's very important we not do that. I think we must be a decent state, and indeed a key to the economy in Illinois is for us to keep our human services, our education, and our healthcare top notch. And so that's what I am committed to do as Governor.

Now I think what we ought to do this year, and I look forward to working with you on it, is to reform our tax system. We have an unfair tax system, and we have had it for way too many years in Illinois. It relies way too much on property taxes, and other levies that are not based on ability to pay. I think there is a principle as old as the Bible: that taxes should be based on ability to pay. Nobody likes paying taxes, nobody. But in a democracy, that's what all of us as citizens do. We understand that self-government means that we have to come together and find a way to finance our government, "we the people." And so I look forward to working with members of the general assembly, this year, on finding a fair way to raise revenue from a fair tax code, but in my opinion, if we work together in good faith, we can cut taxes on 5 million people, maybe more in Illinois. We can find ways using the personal exemption, using the Earned Income Tax Credit, using the property tax relief credit, to cut taxes on people who need help the most, people of modest income and poor people. There is something wrong in Illinois where our state is taxing poor people into further poverty.

I think we as a state, and as general assembly, and as a Governor, can come together, work together, just as we did with the capital bill and the job recovery bill. We can do this, this year - not next year - this year to make sure we have adequate revenue for important things that all of us want in government, but also do it in a fair way that doesn't unfairly tax anyone.

So I look forward to doing that with you. I think it's important that we embark on this journey, and I want to insure you, over the course of this year, that we will continue to cut costs in government. There has only been one governor in the history of Illinois who has a Super-8 card, and I've used it as Governor, and I'm going to continue using it where appropriate. I think it's important to show economy everywhere you can. And I have a VIP card, at that particular dwelling place, or lodging place.

Now in reducing our costs, obviously we have to be careful, and I want to focus on something that is a very important area of our government, the Department of Corrections. It has a budget of over \$1 billion. It's one of the largest departments in Illinois, and it's important that it be managed properly. Now in cutting expenses, it's important that we understand that this has to be done in a focused way. I appointed a director of corrections, a man who I have high regard for; he made a mistake. He told me that in carrying out his cost reductions plans, that if there was going to be any early release programs - 13 states across the country are engaged in these kinds of programs for low-level offenders who have not committed violent crimes. I said that if that had to happen given our dire economy in Illinois, the fact that we don't have as much money in our budget as we'd like to have, we must carry out this program with care, and it can only apply to low-level, non-violent offenders.

In carrying out that mission, the mistakes were made by the director, for which he takes responsibility, and I take accountability. Like President Obama said last week, when you are a chief executive, the buck stops here. I understand that if a mistake is made in government, it must be corrected. And that's exactly what I did. The moment I learned a mistake was made by the Department of Corrections, I suspended the program, I brought into our government, a very wise man, Judge David Erickson, who served as a prosecutor, as a criminal court judge, as an appellate court judge, and now as a teacher at a law school. I asked Judge Erickson to take a look at this entire program in Illinois.

Since 1978 Illinois has had an early release program, it's been authorized by the legislature, signed by the governor. It's been amended a number of times; it has a lot of complicating factors. The judge came back very quickly with a comprehensive report, and I am happy to say that I am carrying out his recommendations in his report.

One of the recommendations is to have a chief public safety officer at the Department of Corrections to look at all releases of all prisoners, whether they be early or not. To make sure that the law enforcement officials in our state have adequate notice with respect to anyone's release. Similarly, there was an unspoken policy or rule, whatever you want to call it, at the department, regarding early release. The judge recommended that that be codified into law, and that's exactly what I recommended to the speaker of the house, the representative here yesterday, and senators. I am very happy that we were able to pass the beginning of our public safety reform initiative, to put into law in Illinois, clear rules for the director of Corrections, who has broad authority with respect to running our prisons.

Having said that, you have to understand in Illinois, for the last 30 years, we have gone from 18,000 inmates in the prison to 46,000. 46,000 men and women are incarcerated in Illinois. Right now, in our state, every year, 28,000 inmates come into prison and 28,000 go out. We have to deal with this issue in our state, like other big states. We want to make sure our prisons incarcerate hardened criminals, at all times. We have to do that. At the same time, our society has to ask itself, "Is the best way to punish a low-level, non-violent offender - someone who has committed a crime and has to serve some kind of punishment - is it the best way to have them go to a state prison, with its cost?" I think it's important in our state that we examine this issue.

I appointed last week Judge Deano DiVito, to look at a Sentence Advisory Council, provided for by law, which was passed by this general assembly. We are going to take a look at this. We want to make sure our prisons are always incarcerating hardened criminals; at the same time we want to take a look at how we deal with these low-level non-violent offenders who still must be punished. There may be other ways; there are other ways to do it, and I think that's something we need to embark on this year. So I look forward to working with you on that mission. I think it's a very important public safety mission.

On the area of public safety, I think we would always be remiss if we didn't acknowledge the great, great work of our men and women in uniform, from our State of Illinois and every state....

On the area of public safety, I think we would always be remiss if we didn't acknowledge the great, great work of our men and women in uniform, from our State of Illinois and from every state. Our State - we are proud, proud of every single boy or girl graduating from high school who answers the call to duty and joins our military. We have a voluntary military in the United States of America, and as Governor of Illinois, I am commander and chief of our National Guard. And as you may know our National Guard was deployed this year to Afghanistan, the largest deployment since WWII of the Illinois National Guard, and it was a very perilous assignment. I went to Fort Bragg, North Carolina to watch their training and saw how arduous it was. We took horrific losses in Afghanistan, 18 were killed in action, 39 critically wounded. These are the best of the best, and I do want to acknowledge the leader of our National Guard in Afghanistan who is with us here today, and he is a man that I think very highly of.

It is Brigadier General Steven Huber, Deputy Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard. He served in our state as the commander of the combined joint taskforce Phoenix, an Illinois National Guard led taskforce, comprised of thousands of troops including more than 3,000 from the State of Illinois. So, General Huber, I met General Huber in Kabul, Afghanistan, and I saw his leadership, and I saw the men and women under his command, and there are not all young. Some of them are almost as old as me, a lot of gray hair; they're part of civil affairs. They go to a very foreboding place at the gates of hell, confronting Al-Qaida and the Taliban, in those mountains of Afghanistan, and they never, ever complained. It was just inspiring to be there with them and, General Huber, on behalf of a grateful State in a grateful nation, thank you very much for your great leadership.

I think that we not only want to express our gratitude; it was so inspiring across Illinois. I went many homecoming ceremonies in Urbana, in Freeport, in Kankakee and Chicago, to see our soldiers come marching home and to see them welcomed - welcomed by our citizenry, the men and women of our

state, who understand how important it is to protect our democracy. And I think related to that is we always in our state have to have the very best programs in our state for our veterans. And I do think as we go through this year, we want to always make sure the programs we have to help our veterans, our service members and their families are always there for them.

We have programs like our Warrior Assistance Program in Illinois; all of our National Guard Members receive help from this. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is a signature injury of this war, the two wars we are in. It is very important that any person from our state who serves in the military, when they come back home if they have need, of any kind of counseling they get that. And we'll provide that, I made sure in our budget last year when there was an effort to cut this program, that that would not be cut. It will never be cut! Because it is very important that we take good care of those who have borne the battle.

The same way with Veteran's Care. We have a program in our state to provide health insurance for veterans who have no health insurance, who are not part of the VA system, and we are going to retain that as well. I am happy to say that this year thanks to the good work of the general assembly we are going to build a new long-term veteran's home in the city of Chicago, for our veterans - the first time in the city of Chicago there will be a long-term care facility for our veterans. That's very important.

It is also important that we employ our veterans. It's a situation unfortunately where when our veterans come home, many of them having fought for us in Baghdad or Afghanistan, have to fight for a job back here at home. That's not acceptable. And it's important that we use our program, Operation Employ our Veterans to its maximum extent to make sure that our veterans get employed. I do want to salute Mick Yaegar and the members of the Teamsters and all those who are involved with "Helmets to Hardhats," a great program that provides jobs for our veterans upon their return. Also we have to understand in Illinois...

We cannot forget our military families, who when our soldiers are deployed from the reserves of the National Guard, we have family members oftentimes living without great resource. Many of our service members, when they enter the military from the reserves of the National Guard, make a financial sacrifice they make less in their military job than they were making in civilian life. These are our citizen soldiers; they have been with us in our country since the beginning of our country. They were there at Concord and Lexington. They're the militia; they're the ones who are always there to stand up for our democracy. So they entered the service; they are making a very modest wage indeed. Their family members oftentimes find it hard to pay the utility bills, to pay the gasoline bills, the healthcare bills. If the roof has a hole in it, how do you pay for that?

So we have a program in Illinois, a good program, the first of its kind in the country. And it's been imitated by many other states, but we have the best. It's called the Illinois Military Family Relief Trust Fund, provides financial assistance to all of our Guard Members and Reservists. It's helped thousands and thousands of families - nearly 20,000 military families in Illinois with more than \$10 million. We want to - I want to thank the general assembly for helping fund that program, and I want to thank the people of Illinois for voluntarily contributing to that program through a check-off box, on our income tax. It's very, very important that we not forget that.

It's also important that we honor those families who have lost a son or daughter in these conflicts in Iraq or Afghanistan. They come from our state. Since I have been Governor, there have been 36 service members killed in action in Iraq and Afghanistan - 36 in just one year. There have been 270 since the war began there on September 11, 2001. And we have families in Illinois, Gold Star families, who will never see their son or daughter again. Someone they've known from the day they were born. There are no words in the English language, or any language, to relieve the pain of losing such a special person.

I went to two funerals over the weekend: one a funeral in Chicago and another one, a wake in Troy Illinois, in Southern Illinois. And a grandmother of Brad Smith, Senior Airman Brad Smith, cried on my shoulder, there is no ways you can consol a grandmother who has lost somebody she was very devoted to. Just like on Saturday a young man Sgt. Albert Weir, who was born in Monrovia Liberia, in Africa, immigrated - immigrated to our country. He was an immigrant, came to Chicago, learned in Chicago, went to school in Chicago, volunteered, volunteered for our military. He was deployed to Afghanistan, not once but twice, lost his life.

It is important that we not forget our Gold Star parents, we have one of them here today, and I think it is important that we recognize this man and his wife, the step-mom. Because Christopher Alcozer, I was at his funeral a few years ago, and there was the hate group from Kansas there, they tried to disrupt the funeral; they echoed very vile epithets had vile signs. It was a it was a very difficult day, but Jesse Alcozer, his wife Judy, and Kathy Alcozer the mother of Christopher Alcozer, who was killed defending our country is a real hero. He saved other people's lives. He was only 19; he played the viola, and he was a wrestler. He combined a lot of skills in life. God didn't give him a long life, but He gave him a purposeful life. And I think it is important that all of us in the Land of Lincoln remember Abraham Lincoln's words at Gettysburg, 272 words. He said that it's important for all of us, the living, to honor those who give their last full measure of devotion to our democracy, to our government of the people, to our opportunity to be here to have a democracy and make laws and make people's lives better. So I'm very grateful to the Alcozer family. I'd like to have them stand up and be recognized for all they've done for our country.

I just want to point out that Jesse Alcozer is a Vietnam veteran. We all know our country didn't do Vietnam veterans right when they came home, and Jesse was listed once missing in action. He was wounded seven times during the Vietnam War - thought to be dead. Well he is definitely not dead, because he testified and helped us pass a law not that long ago called "Let Them Rest in Peace." We in Illinois believe in honoring all of those who have given their lives. We make sure that their funerals are reverent and dignified. And any group that seeks to heckle or disrupt a funeral, whether it be military or civilian, has to stand aside. That's what members of the general assembly did not that long ago. This law has worked very well to make sure that we have reverence and dignity at our military funerals. So, I thank you for that.

And, in closing, I think it's important to understand in our state that there are those amongst us who aren't celebrities. They'll never be on the front page of the paper. They'll never be on TV. They're just the heart and soul of Illinois. Their kids are the ones who answer the call to duty. They go forward in

the face of danger to defend us. They work as a team without complaint. They don't whine. They aren't petty. And I think we can take great example from those men and women.

My father served in the United States Navy three years, one month, fifteen days. That was the only public service he was ever involved in. He was in a private job the rest of his life. He lived to be 93. God blessed him with a long life. But he always felt that the time in the United States Navy was a special time. And I think about my father here today because when I got sworn in on this very place, I talked about my father. I read something from his accommodation by his commanding officer in the United States Navy. He said my father was earnest, cooperative, and honest, and cheerful, and he believed in teamwork. And I kind of think that's what we've got to do in Illinois. We've got terrible challenges. The toughest we've probably ever had in our lifetime. We can play politics. We can call each other names. We can kind of avoid the problems. But that's really not what our service members do when they get responsibilities. It certainly wasn't what my father did in life. So he taught me always to work hard, to treat other people with dignity, don't call people names, be honest, be trustworthy.

That, to me, is what Illinois is all about. Our state, the Land of Lincoln, the people of our state, they're the best of the best. We're the pride of our nation. We can accomplish great things if we work together. So I look forward to doing that with you, everyone here, today, tomorrow and every day in the future, and we'll make the will of the people the law of the land. Thank you very much.